DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 281 635 PS 016 496

AUTHOR Lee, Irene K.
TITLE Joys of Grandparenting.
INSTITUTION Arkansas Univ., Fayetteville, Cooperative Extension Service.
SPONS AGENCY Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO FSHE127-4M-10-85
PUB DATE Oct 85
NOTE 5p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Family Involvement; *Family Life; *Family Relationship; *Grandchildren; *Grandparents

ABSTRACT

This brief publication offers advice to grandparents on their interactions with their grandchildren. Discussion first focuses on problematic aspects of the grandparenting role and then explores ways grandparents can improve the lives of children and ways grandchildren can improve the lives of grandparents. Readers are urged to use the suggestions offered to gain more from the grandparenting experience. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

ED281635
PS 016496

Joys of Grandparenting

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Irene K. Lee
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Dr. Irene K. Lee
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

One of the pleasures in life is being a grandparent. To a large extent, this is because older adults can enjoy grandchildren on their own terms without feeling responsible for them.

Grandparenting can be challenging and rewarding. It gives people opportunities for continued growth and expansion of their lives. It helps them recognize the continuity of life. The past is linked with the future as grandparents pass their heritage on to their grandchildren.

Many grandparents are busy expanding their lives with their own activities. They have their independence and yet, at the same time, have the sense of being wanted and needed by their loved ones.

But grandparents are often puzzled about their roles in families. Feeling lost, useless, and in the way is a frequent complaint of older people. Many want to be helpful to their grandchildren, but they are uncertain how to best fit into the modern society.

Grandparents want to feel needed and to find meaningful activity to make life worthwhile. This need is particularly acute for the widowed grandmother who does not work outside the home or for the retired grandfather left alone with few responsibilities or interests.

Grandparents and their grandchildren have very special relationships. Grandparents are often the ones who have the time and patience to read a story over and over again. They are often "fixers" who have the time to mend broken toys or even to make new ones. Grandparents and grandchildren have fun sharing experiences like baking cookies, feeding the animals at the zoo, visiting the county fair, and taking a walk in the park. Grandparents know the importance of providing young people with many different experiences, and so they enjoy helping grandchildren make new discoveries.

Grandparents may take charge of their adult children's families, thus enabling both parents to work outside the home.

Sometimes couples take advantage of grandparents. They use them excessively as babysitters, often dumping grandchildren on them without forewarning. At other times, couples expect gifts, clothes, money, and favors but never really show appreciation.

Grandparents are often criticized for showing too little or too much interest, or for the way they do try to help. Is it any wonder grandparents ask: "I wonder what kind of grandparent they really expect me to be?" Such a question points to the need for couples and grandparents to discuss feelings and expectations of the role of the grandparent in the family.

Whether you are a grandparent living with your children or a grandparent living in another town, here are some points worth considering if you are to gain from the experience of grandparenting.

Accept the fact that the parents have the final responsibility for your grandchildren. This holds true unless you care for the grandchildren day after day in the absence of their own mother or father.

Cooperative Extension Service

In all other cases, parents should have the final word on how their children are to be raised. Grandparents should never disregard family rules in the family's home.

Disciplining grandchildren is one of the most frequent topics for disagreement. Grandparents sometimes want to be more lenient than parents and will speak up to minimize the parent's disciplinary actions.

Remember parents have the ultimate responsibility for their children. Grandparents who interfere with the disciplining undermine that responsibility.

An important part of grandparenting is knowing the difference between being lenient with children and spoiling them. Some grandparents boast that they have fun spoiling their grandchildren and then send them back to their parents. Grandparents who love their grandchildren respect the authority of the parents because they want what is best for their grandchildren.

Children's behavior in the grandparents' home which merits disciplinary action places more responsibility on grandparents. This is particularly true if the parents do not take action. House rules should be established by residents of the home and followed by guests.

Be willing to let each generation of parents make its own mistakes. Families differ in the ways of childrearing. It is hard to stand by and watch young parents go forward on a course that seems likely to end in unhappiness. But unless advice or assistance is sought, the grandparent must be willing to allow freedom—even the freedom to make mistakes.

Grandparents should recall that they seldom listened to their own parents and that they made mistakes too. The important elements are enough love and mutual respect in the family.

Never use your advantage of more leisure time and less responsibility to compete for the loyalty and love of your grandchildren for their parents. It is dangerous and unethical to come between a child and his mother or father. Never try to turn grandchildren against their parents or try to recast them in your image. Developing interests and friendships outside the family can take away much of the pressure of wanting love and attention from the grandchildren.

Grandparents who learn early to master the arts of positive family relationships build important ties not only for the moment but also for the future as their grandchildren grow up and become teenagers, are launched, and form families on their own.

Remember that being a grandparent is not a full-time career. You should continue to live a separate life of your own. Keep up with your old friends. Pay attention to your looks and dress. Cultivate some personal interests such as reading, music, a course of study, crafts, club membership, volunteer service work, visit shut-ins, paid labor or community projects.

Try to keep up to date. Don't look back to the old days by telling your children how much better things were then. Make an effort to keep up with the ways life has changed, or even improved.

Don't demand consideration because of your age or status in life. Try to earn it by winning respect and contributing to the well-being of the family. Do your share to ease burdens and to generate cheerfulness. Don't indulge in self-pity. Remember, the more you can give to others, the more you will receive from life.

What Grandparents Can Do For Children

Grandparents can help children feel secure and loved. Grandparents can give love and attention within the rules and limits of parents. They can enjoy their grandchildren without going outside the boundaries the family has established.

Children can never have too much of the right kind of love—love that helps children grow and develop, that eliminates anxiety, tension, and hurt. Love that adds security, trust, and accepts and understands is always needed. However, if grandparents spoil and pamper or try to possess, their love is harmful rather than helpful.

The love that the grandchild experiences with his grandparents will depend upon the role the grandparents play in relationship to him. The grandchild will establish a mutually joyous relationship with fun-seeking grandparents. These grandparents are informal and playful, joining the child for the purpose of having fun—a mutual satisfaction. Authority lines are not a part of this grandparenting style.

The formal grandparents take an interest in the child, give treats and indulgences, and occasionally help the parents, but see their role in strict terms. These grandparents do not offer advice and leave parenting strictly to the parents. From the

formal grandparents, the grandchild will derive a certain satisfaction, knowing that nurturing and some response are forthcoming.

The distant figure grandparents feel remote from the grandchild and acknowledge little effect of the grandchild upon their own life. Although these grandparents maintain a benevolent attitude, give gifts, and go through certain motions, there is little feeling or response.

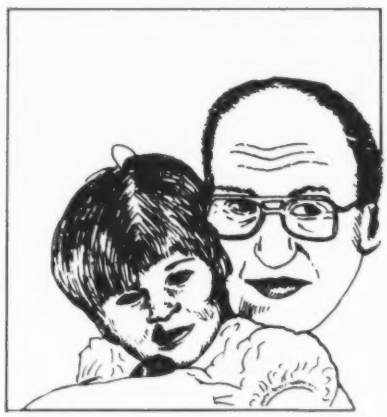
Grandparents help children to know, trust, and understand other people. If the child's contact with adults is limited just to parents, he is likely to have too narrow a view of the world and other people.

Grandparents often enjoy grandchildren. In turn, grandchildren may find grandparents good listeners, helpers, and close friends. Grandparents know the world isn't going to end because a child doesn't do everything perfectly.

Children can learn that grandma's arms can be just as comforting as mother's. They discover grandfather's house to be a safe and happy home away from home. They learn how to be flexible and to adjust to the ways grandmother thinks, feels, and behaves which are different from the way mother does. Visits to grandparents can be an enlivening experience for the children and grandchildren.

Grandparents can help children bridge the gap between the past and present. Grandparents who have more leisure time to discuss problems with their grandchildren than have perhaps their busy parents can contribute a sense of history and perspective to family discussions.

Many see today's grandparents as experts in change, who have much to offer children. Grandparents can communicate to children a sense of wonder at man's achievements. They who have seen the first airplane, talking movies, television, computers, and satellites can inspire in their grandchild a future in which almost anything can be accomplished.



Most children enjoy hearing grandparents tell about life when they were growing up. Grandparents who are able to share the rich heritage of the past with children give them a deeper, broader foundation upon which to base their own lives and to build new knowledge. Sharing the past in person is best, but it can also be shared through letters and tape recordings.

One of the main roles of grandparents is to serve as the focal point of the wider family of aunts, uncles, and cousins. Even when families live apart, grandparents bind them together emotionally. They help family members remember all they have in common.

Grandparents can provide children with experiences and supervision their own parents do not have time or money to provide. A grandfather who has the time and money to take his grandchild to the fair, circus, museum, or vacation church school is greatly enriching the life of the grandchild.

Grandparents can give children a sense of values and a philosophy of life which is the result of years of living. Valuable experiences and lessons learned by living need to be shared. Look closely at your everyday life and that of the child and discover what you can talk about with the child.

Grandparents can give children a wholesome attitude toward old age. Especially in western culture where youth is worshipped, children need to know and learn to respect their elders. Older people who live rich, fruitful, meaningful lives are a good example for children.

There are many rewards in grandparenting. Grandparents who hear the confidences of their grandchildren and share the mysteries of life with them enjoy a unique fellowship with their grandchildren. All of these give deep satisfactions. It is equally rewarding to look back on a job well done, as adult children establish their families and carry on some of the family traditions and values.

Grandparents today have more independence than in the past. They are freer to travel, to enjoy new leisure time activities, and to be friends with their grandchildren. They can share their rich experiences from the past with their grandchildren.

What Grandchildren Can Do For Grandparents

Grandparents often have more time to devote to children. There are so many demands on parents that they are usually very busy, but older people often have time on their hands. But no matter what age a person is, he has basic needs, both physical and emotional, that must be met.

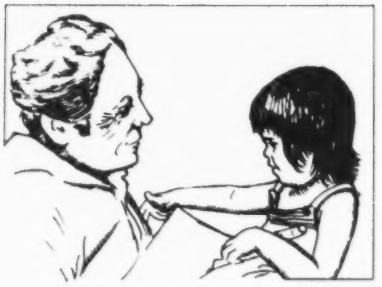
The ways in which needs are satisfied are different at different ages. But older people, like younger people, need to feel adequate. They, like all of us, need to love and be loved.

There are many things grandchildren can do to meet the needs of grandparents. Following are a few ideas.

Grandchildren can give grandparents their affection. Their love and company are probably the best gifts they can give to their grandparents. They probably love them anyway, but it may be that there are more and new ways that they can show their love.

If the grandchildren live with or near their grandparents, they should visit them occasionally. Even a few minutes of their time will make life happier for themselves as well as for their grandparents.

Grandchildren can learn from their grandparents. Grandparents have firsthand knowledge of events that are now history. Grandchildren can learn a great deal of history from their



grandparents, and it will be history with a personal slant. When grandchildren learn from grandparents, they are doing more than just developing their own understanding. They are also helping their grandparents to satisfy their need to feel adequate. It is good for the grandchildren as well as for the grandparents.

Grandchildren can let their grandparents enjoy them. Sometimes grandchildren can satisfy grandparents in ways that their own children did not satisfy them. Parents enjoy watching their children grow up, but because life is so busy and because parenthood is often hectic, they cannot sit off and watch their children's growth in a peaceful, unhurried sort of way. Grandparents can.

Because they are not responsible for children and because they are not too busy, they can enjoy new things that come along in the grandchild's development.

Grandchildren can let grandparents live their own lives. Older people like to do things in their own ways just as younger people like to do things in their own ways. They have spent years developing habits and preferences. They like to do the same things in the same ways even if they seem old-fashioned to the grandchildren.

Older people sometimes feel unsure of themselves because of their decline in physical powers. And they feel uncertain because their husbands or wives are dead.

With this unsteadiness, it is not hard to understand why old people keep to their old habits of thinking. It gives them something sure to cling to as their world changes.

If grandchildren understand why grandparents stay "old fashioned," it may help them to respect their pattern of living. And respecting their ways often keeps grandchildren from becoming impatient with their grandparents.

Grandparents play an important role in a family. The sense of continuity as a family, the tie with the past, the ongoing affection, the personal interest, the help in a crisis, make grandparents invaluable. With the birth of children, grandparents come into their own, and can greatly enrich the lives of the children as well as parents. We are not always smart about these widening relationships. All of us, grandparents, parents, and children have much to learn in deriving the face value of these important relationships.

There are many joys of grandparenting. The grandparenting experience is the foundation for establishing positive family relationships. Use these suggestions to gain more from your grandparenting experience.

An Extension Home Economics publication•University of Arkansas

DR. IRENE K. LEE is Extension family and child development specialist, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.

I27 JOYS OF GRANDPARENTING

Issued in furtherance of Extension work, Act of September 29, 1977, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Dr. Arthur L. Allen, Administrator, Cooperative Extension Program, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Program offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, or handicap, and is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer.

FSHEI27-4M-10-85